

Virginia Employment Commission

The FORUM

Virginia's Labor Market & Occupational Information Newsletter

Volume 9, Number 3

Winter 2009

This Issue's Focus: Higher Education for Working Adults



PLUS: What is Trade School?

Welcome to Winter issue of *The Forum* newsletter.

In today's tough job market, employers are looking for the best qualified person to hire. The higher education you have, the better your chances. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, people with degrees of higher learning earned more per year and have a lower unemployment rate than those with just a high school degree or lower. In this issue, we will be focusing on some of the many opportunities now available to the working adults who would like to finish their undergraduate degree or seek a higher degree.

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Editor: David R. Tysinger

Assistant Editor: Joan McDorman

Issue content research, layout/graphic design: Linda Simmons

The Gift of a College Degree Lasts a Lifetime

salary.com

And once earned, a college degree is forever, as the payoff from higher education can never be erased, broken or laid off.

Any way you measure it, a college degree is the best investment of your life. In today's dollars, a bachelor's degree is worth more than \$2.1 million over 40 years. "Having that post-secondary diploma can make such a difference in lifetime earnings," said Washington, D.C.-based Employment Policy Foundation President Ed Potter.

During a recession, obtaining a college degree becomes even more crucial. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, all seven of the job categories that are predicted to grow faster than average during the next decade require a college diploma. These careers, which include teaching, health care, and technology, will account for 42 percent of the nation's projected job growth by 2013.

Conversely, men and women without a post-secondary degree are losing ground. The Department of Labor reports that employments for those with bachelor's degrees grew by 1.8 million during the past 10 years compared to a loss of nearly 700,000 jobs for those armed with a high school diploma.

But earnings are only part of the benefits. A college education enriches your life in ways that cannot be measured by dollars. "Education is power," Frederick Douglass observed nearly 150 years ago. Today, education remains the path out of poverty toward opportunity. It is also the route to achievement, enrichment, knowledge and success. Most important of all, education makes dreams come true.

Whether personal or practical, the college experience can be both life affirming and career enhancing. The classroom and the coursework expose you to diverse people and ideas. They open up a world that challenges and stimulates you in ways both big and small. You'll discover new interests or pursue familiar subjects with passion and depth. Business, history, literature, teaching, medicine, technology, the arts—the list is endless. Along the way, your knowledge base expands, your critical-thinking skills become sharper and your confidence grows.

And once earned, a college degree is forever, as the payoff from higher education can never be erased,

broken, or laid off. Here are a few examples of that payoff:

- ▶ A career that is professionally satisfying and intellectually stimulating; one that taps into your potential and challenges you to perform at your peak.
- ▶ A profession that is in demand with upwardly mobile opportunities.
- ▶ An arsenal of skills that empower you to control the pace and direction of your career.
- ▶ A secure future that comes with a steady profession that can ride out any economic rollercoaster.

Even during a recession, the U.S. Bureau of Labor projects that 23 million jobs will be created in the next decade. Management-related occupations will account for nearly a third of the total, according to the Employment Policy Foundation, a non-profit, non-partisan research and educational foundation focusing on workplace trends and policies.

In addition, a just-completed survey conducted for the Chronicle of Higher Education shows that despite unease with the economy, Americans' faith in higher education is unwavering. The nation continues to have confidence in the value of a college degree, with more than half of respondents saying it is "essential for success." Your future depends on it.



Source: Salary.com is a website that specializes in compensation information for employers. Articles on compensation and pay trends can be found in the Knowledge Center section of their website.

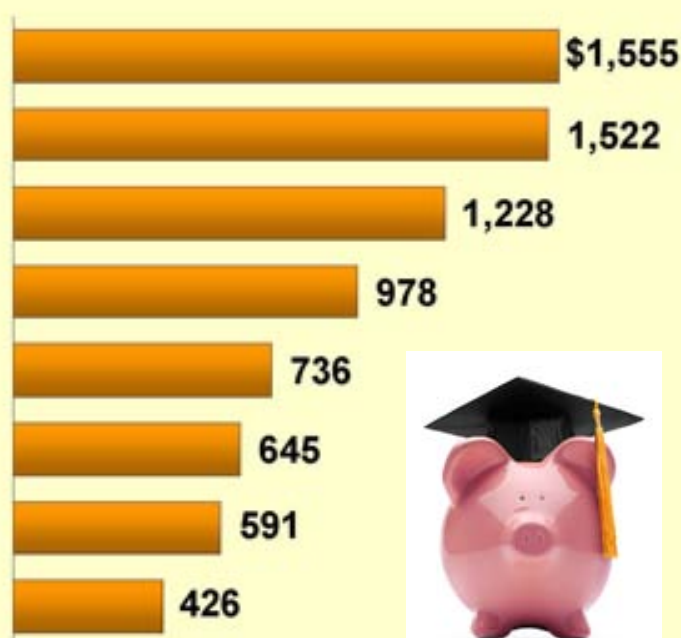
Education Pays

bls.gov

Unemployment rate in 2008



Median weekly earnings in 2008



Note: Data are 2008 annual averages for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

Now Available—Copier-Ready Handouts

The handouts can be downloaded at www.VirginiaLMI.com

Top Skills and Work Values Employers Want

Top 5 Skills

- Communication Skills (listening, verbal, written)**
By far, the one skill mentioned most often by employers is the ability to listen, write, and speak effectively. This means the ability to listen, express oneself fluently and intelligently, and to use proper spelling and grammar to communicate effectively.
- Analytical/Research Skills**
Once with your ability to assess a situation, analyze data, and identify key issues. Especially valued processing, spreadsheet, and research skills.
- Computer/Technical Literacy**
Almost all jobs now require some basic computer skills. Employers value those who can use word processing, spreadsheets, and other software effectively.
- Leadership and Management Skills**
These skills deal with your ability to lead, motivate, and coach employees to meet organizational goals. They are especially valued in those who will manage others.
- Problem-Solving, Reasoning**
Involves the ability to find solutions to problems. Employers value those who can think critically and solve problems.

Strong Work Ethic
Employers value employees who are reliable, punctual, and take pride in their work. They also value those who are motivated and take initiative.

Dependable and Responsible
Employers value employees who are reliable, punctual, and take pride in their work. They also value those who are motivated and take initiative.

Possessing a Positive Attitude
Employers value employees who are positive, optimistic, and resilient. They also value those who are motivated and take initiative.

Adaptability
Employers value employees who can adapt to change and new challenges. They also value those who are motivated and take initiative.

Honesty and Integrity
Employers value employees who are honest, ethical, and trustworthy. They also value those who are motivated and take initiative.

Education Pays...

We often hear the advice Today—that advice is more relevant than ever.

- Earnings go up with every year of school degree program is completed.
- Education pays off because better-educated workers are usually more organized.
- Remember that the differences in earnings between those with a high school diploma and those with a bachelor's degree are usually more significant than you think.

Education Attainment	Median Weekly Earnings	Unemployment Rate
Less than a high school diploma	\$426	9.0%
High school graduate	\$591	5.7%
Some college, no degree	\$645	5.1%
Associate degree	\$736	3.7%
Bachelor's degree	\$978	2.8%
Master's degree	\$1,228	2.4%
Professional degree	\$1,522	1.7%
Doctorate degree	\$1,555	2.0%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics/Current Population Survey

Eight Keys to Employability

- Personal Values**
Valued workers:
Are honest and forthright
Exhibit a good attitude
Have personal and career goals
Have a positive self-image
- Problem-Solving and Decision-Making**
Valued workers:
Adapt to change
Are flexible
Are creative and innovative
Can reason and make objective judgments
Plan and organize work
- Relationships With Others**
Valued workers:
Accept authority and supervision
Are team players
Are friendly, cooperative, and tactful
Have leadership qualities
Respect the rights and property of others
Respect constructive criticism
Respect diversity
- Communication**
Valued workers:
Ask questions and listen well
Express themselves clearly
Notify supervisors of absences
Seek help when needed
- Task-Related Attributes**
Valued workers:
Care for tools and materials
Complete work on time
Follow directions
Stick with a task
Work safely and accurately
Work to improve their performance

Sample Job Application

Employers use job applications to screen for qualifications. If a job application does not make a favorable impression, you may not even get an interview with an employer. Here are some tips to help you complete your application.

- Fill in an application out online in the most professional look.** Many public libraries, computer stores, and other organizations offer computer access. If the application is not available online, ask for a paper copy.
- Complete all spaces and be accurate.** Be sure to have the correct address of your former places of employment, supervisors, and references. Write "N/A" for not applicable if you do not have a particular skill or experience. Even though space on applications is limited, abbreviations so a potential employer can read your application.
- Choose your references wisely.** Choose former co-workers, teachers, or friends you use. Be sure to notify the people you are using as references. Choose people who will speak positively about you.
- Spell correctly and use proper English.** Writing skills are valued by employers. Misspellings and grammatically incorrect sentences give a poor impression of your abilities. Use action verbs, such as: achieved, assisted, earned, focused, etc., to describe your experiences.

On the next page is a sample application for you to complete. You can take the completed sample to use as a reference when you fill out an actual application.

Tomorrow's Jobs

Fastest-growing occupations and occupations projected to have the fastest numerical increases in employment between 2006 and 2016, by level of postsecondary education or training.

Occupation	Level of Education or Training	Projected Numerical Increase (2006-2016)
Software Developers	Bachelor's degree	10,000
Software Engineers	Bachelor's degree	10,000
Computer and Network Architects	Bachelor's degree	10,000
Database Administrators	Bachelor's degree	10,000
Network Engineers	Bachelor's degree	10,000
Systems Administrators	Bachelor's degree	10,000
Computer Support Specialists	High school diploma	10,000
Information Security Analysts	Bachelor's degree	10,000
Computer and Network Monitors	Bachelor's degree	10,000
Computer and Network Installers	High school diploma	10,000
Computer and Network Repairers	High school diploma	10,000
Computer and Network Support Specialists	High school diploma	10,000
Computer and Network Systems Administrators	Bachelor's degree	10,000
Computer and Network Systems Engineers	Bachelor's degree	10,000
Computer and Network Systems Managers	Bachelor's degree	10,000
Computer and Network Systems Support Specialists	High school diploma	10,000
Computer and Network Systems Technicians	High school diploma	10,000
Computer and Network Systems Trainers	Bachelor's degree	10,000
Computer and Network Systems Writers	Bachelor's degree	10,000
Computer and Network Systems Operators	High school diploma	10,000
Computer and Network Systems Administrators	Bachelor's degree	10,000
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Computer and Network Systems Administrators	Bachelor's degree	10,000
Computer and Network Systems Engineers	Bachelor's degree	

What is a Trade School?

S.E. Smith

A vocational or trade school is a school which focuses on providing graduates with marketable skills.

Common examples of [trade schools](#) include maritime academies, [esthetician](#) colleges, culinary schools, automotive repair training programs, and training for medical technicians. After graduating from a trade school, an individual will be able to immediately enter the job market with his or her skills, and be able to receive a high rate of compensation.

Because a trade school is less costly to attend, and provides graduates with immediately useful skills and sometimes job placement services, going to trade school is an option that many high school graduates consider in alternative to a college or university.

Many trade school programs are equivalent to college programs, and most of them last for a minimum of two years, but sometimes much longer. In a well run trade school, students will learn the basics of their trade and be able to practice it. In addition, most trade school educations offer financial planning advice along with courses in business ethics and workshops to acquaint students with the legal issues surrounding their chosen trade. After graduating, a student will be certified, and eligible to take any state administered tests which may pertain to his or her trade.

In some parts of the world, trade schools are associated with minimal education, but this is a misconception. While graduates of trade schools do not have the background that a liberal arts education provides, they are highly trained and skilled individuals who often receive well grounded educations in addition to their technical training. Admission to trade schools is rigorous, and most of them are accredited, just like colleges are, and subject to review to ensure that their curricula are strong.

For many students, the trade school environment is more supportive of their long term goals than a traditional college. Many trade schools receive assistance from the government so that they can offer housing, childcare, nutrition education, and other options to disadvantaged students, usually for free or at a minimal price. Job placement services are often an important part of the offerings of a trade school, and staff follow up with their students to see

how they are performing in the outside world after graduation.



Source: www.wisegeek.com (on this website is a team of researchers, writers, and editors dedicated to providing clear and concise answers to common questions.)

Another Good Source for Vocational Training Schools...

Guide To Career Education is an education directory specializing in degree programs, vocational certifications, and career training. From online schools and universities to campus-based colleges and technical institutes, this site has detailed information on schools, accreditation, financial aid, degrees, and certifications. See www.guidetocareereducation.com for more information.

FOCUS



There are many reasons why people don't pursue or finish higher education after high school. Sometimes they are not ready to focus on a college degree. Sometimes life gets in the way and they are not able to finish a degree program. However, statistics show that having a higher degree increases yearly earning potential, the potential for career advancement, and better job security. Many high-skilled, high-paying jobs require college degrees, and job applicants that do not meet the basic requirement don't even make it past the application screening stage in the hiring process. That's why it is valuable to get, or finish, a higher degree.

Now, more than ever, there are a multitude of colleges and institutions that offer degree programs especially designed for the working adult. In this article we will examine three subjects dealing with higher education for the working adult: is higher education the right decision for you, traditional degree programs, and online degree programs designed for working adults.

Are You Ready to Go Back to School?



It's never too late to consider starting a degree program or finishing one you had started earlier. Here are a few things to consider when deciding if you are ready to go back to school:

- ▶ **Do you have a clear understanding of what you want to accomplish?**—if you know you need a bachelor's degree to get a pay raise or move into management, then going back to school would make sense. However, if you are looking to just strengthen a specific professional or technical skill, you may not need a degree program. A single course or a certification program with just a few courses may be all you would need.
- ▶ **Does your employer offer tuition reimbursement?**—According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 50% of companies with 100 or more employees offer some sort of tuition reimbursement or tuition assistance if the program you choose is related to your field of employment with that company. Check with your company's Human Resource Department to find out if you qualify.

- ▶ **Have you considered both the long- and short-term financial impact of seeking a higher degree?**—degrees don't come cheap, but the benefits usually pay for themselves after a few years in higher salary and/or job promotions. Look closely at your budget and think of how paying for school will affect you and your family over the next few years.
- ▶ **Do you have the support of your family and those closest to you?**—Talk with your family, explaining the impact of your return to school, to see if they are willing and able to support your efforts.
- ▶ **Do you have your employer's "buy-in"?**—be sure you have your manager's backing. Don't assume that you can use the work laptop to respond to discussion questions from class or work on your homework during your lunch hour.
- ▶ **Do you fully understand the time you will need to commit to a degree program?**—On average, a three-credit college course will require ten to twelve hours per week.

Once you have concluded that you are ready to seek a higher degree, then you need to decide how you will pursue that higher education: through an online program, a traditional institution, one of the many national programs that have campuses nationwide, or a combination of the above.

A More Traditional Education for the Working Adult

There are many options now available for working adults to finish their bachelor's or seek a higher degree. Some people work better in an actual classroom with an instructor instead of a more independent online program. Also, some industries prefer degrees from established institutions more so than online degrees. If a more traditional classroom setting is what you are looking for, then the next step is to find an institution in your area that best fits your needs.

Many established universities and colleges are now offering programs designed specifically for working adults with all the classes needed to complete the program being offered at night or on the weekend.

Many Virginia universities and colleges offer programs for continued studies. For example:

- ▶ **Averett University** offers several accelerated programs for working adults in business and education. There are campuses located in central, Tidewater, and southern Virginia.
- ▶ **George Mason University** offers a Continuing Professional Education program where students can get degrees or certifications. The university has four campuses with locations in Northern Virginia.
- ▶ **Mary Baldwin College** offers co-ed graduate and adult degree programs. The adult degree program is offered on-campus in Staunton or at various satellite campuses: Charlottesville, Peninsula, Richmond, Roanoke, South Boston, and Weyers Cave.
- ▶ **University of Richmond** has a School of Continuing Studies program that offers graduate degrees and certification programs.

There are also several national universities with campuses throughout Virginia that offer accredited degree programs. Some of these are: **University of Phoenix**, **DeVry University**, **Strayer University**, and **ITT Technical Institute**.

The best way to find a program that fits your needs is to go online to these institutions' websites and review the program requirements and see what degrees and certifications are available.

www.gmu.edu

www.mbc.edu

www.richmond.edu

<http://www.averettuniv.com>

<http://aptm.phoenix.edu>

<http://www.devry.edu>

<http://strayer.edu-info.com>

<http://itt-tech.edu>

There are more universities and colleges than what we have highlighted here. A good website to find more Virginia colleges is:

<http://www.colleges.virginia.cc>

This site lists most of the universities and colleges in Virginia, and has direct links to their websites.



Online Degree Programs

Getting a degree online is becoming more common, and there are more choices now than ever before. Although the cost is almost the same as going to a campus, there are many advantages to seeking a degree online:

- ▶ free from geographical constraints and residency requirements
- ▶ can pursue a degree while working a full-time job, traveling, or serving in the military
- ▶ more flexible schedules
- ▶ you can work at your own pace, view lectures, or participate in discussions at any time.

Although an online degree can be convenient, one must be careful about the online program he/she chooses and what institution he/she gets it from. Also, some business fields might not be as accepting of an online degree as a more traditional one.

Because online degree programs are more in demand, there are also more institutions that are trying to look like a credible program when they might be less reputable. It is important to look for an accredited program that has been accredited by a reliable organization. There are some online websites that give good lists of accredited online programs.

Several national programs like DeVry and the University of Phoenix offer online programs, but more established institutions are now offering online programs as well. Virginia Tech has online programs (www.vto.vt.edu), as well as Virginia State (www.vsu.edu/docs/distanceed.htm), and the University of Richmond (<http://scs.richmond.edu/professional/online>), just to name a few.

Sources: eLearners.com and Bankrate.com

Top 10 Ranked Online Universities and Colleges

1. DeVry University

First established in Chicago in 1931, DeVry University has a long and prestigious history as one of the United States' top professional training institutions. DeVry offers a multitude of career-oriented degrees, ranging from information technology to business and medical administration, and often at an accelerated pace for students who want to power through their degree and move on to bigger and better things. Meanwhile, on the convenience front, the option of studying online or at one of the school's numerous campuses makes it easy to find a program and schedule that will fit your life. As if that weren't enough, DeVry boasts an unprecedented 90% job placement success rate. Sounds like a winner, from where we stand!

2. University of Phoenix

University of Phoenix is not your parents' correspondence college. Well, it was, when it was founded in 1976 on the idea that quality higher education should be affordable and accessible to everyone, even working students. Three decades later that foundation hasn't changed: between flexible scheduling and its highly-qualified professors, the university still dedicates itself to providing opportunities to students with full plates. That said, University of Phoenix has since blossomed into a thoroughly modern institution. With an eBook library, a commitment to environmental sustainability practices, and a presence on every social network imaginable. The University of Phoenix knows what its 21st-century students demand, and what's more, it delivers in full.

3. Walden University

When business magazine *Fast Company* reviewed and graded five online colleges, they only handed out one straight-A. That coveted glowing review went to graduate degree haven Walden University, the same school that was singled out by *U.S. News and World Report* as a "respected virtual institution." Why such praise? It may have something to do with its affordable classes and its multimedia approach to learning. Or maybe it's the sense of community it strives to foster among its students, with forums and an online student union. One thing's for certain: as an online college contender, Walden University has made its mark.

4. Westwood College

Westwood College, originally based in Denver, CO, only entered the online college scene in 2002, but already it has had a major impact with its unique interpretation of the online college experience. Placing value on a real classroom atmosphere, Westwood utilizes audio/video technology to capture the feel of a real lecture; students are also provided with real hard-copy books, allowing them time to study away from the computer screen. Westwood also seems to realize that education doesn't just stop once you've received your diploma. The school offers an Alumni Retraining Program, where former students can continue to stay on top of new developments and practice updates in their field, tuition-free. Though new to the game, don't expect Westwood Online to leave any time soon.

5. Capella University

Though not quite as new as Westwood, Capella University is still a fairly recent addition to the correspondence college family, with fifteen years of service under its belt. Within that time, Capella has risen to become one of the most prestigious institutions in its class. Specializing in graduate degrees, the university nonetheless offers a multitude of degree programs at every level and encourages student discourse and participation in the form of class discussions, assignment postings, and faculty and peer reviews. Although Capella is strictly an online school, representatives and faculty often travel the country to hold seminars and conferences, making connections with students of its past, present, and future.

6. Colorado Technical University

Though Colorado Technical University can only lend its services to those within state lines, students from all over the world can benefit from an education at Colorado Technical University Online. Understanding that different students have different wants and needs in learning, CTU offers options in the classroom: you can choose to "show up" for live classes and chat online with your professors and classmates, or watch prerecorded lectures. One thing that doesn't change, however, is being taught by knowledgeable professors who are respected and active in their fields. In addition, not only can you earn a valuable degree, but also résumé-enhancing academic certificates as you gain important skills along the way. It all adds up to a college that consistently ranks among the top online universities in the nation.

7. American InterContinental University

There are plenty of universities out there, but how many of them are truly global institutions? With campuses from Los Angeles to London, and now reaching farther than ever via the power of the internet, American InterContinental University (AIU) certainly fits the bill. AIU is on a mission to cultivate a geographically and culturally diverse student population and provide their students with quality education in a choice of many subjects to help them advance in their careers. A bustling virtual campus, interactive learning labs, crackerjack career services center, and growing global community of students and alumni all come together to make AIU an excellent choice for an online education.

8. Argosy University

When the powers of three recently merged colleges combine, the outcome is Argosy University, one of today's hottest online learning institutions. Specializing in business, education, and health care, Argosy's goal is to encourage a good sense of ethics and social skills within the professional fields to which it caters. On a related note, Argosy has an excellent relationship with all branches of the U.S. military and its veterans, offering everything from honoring of the G.I. Bill and loan repayment programs to tutorial assistance and tuition supplements for dependents.

9. Kaplan University

If you've ever taken the SAT, ACT, or an advanced placement test, then you must be familiar by now with Kaplan, Incorporated—but did you know that the popular college prep institution is also a college

in and of itself? If you live outside of Iowa or Nebraska, you might be unfamiliar with their campuses, but luckily Kaplan has gone online and is up there with the best of them. Kaplan knows a thing or two about enhancing your success in education, and their online university is no exception. Along with active peer forums, a commitment to professor/student communication and innovative practices like web-based "field trips" and interactive seminars, Kaplan grants students access to knowledgeable advisors and an immense resource library. It can be a comforting thought to know that a place so dedicated to helping you in your academic accomplishments doesn't quit once you graduate high school.

10. Baker College

Rounding out the top ten is Michigan-based Baker College Online. Baker is a no-frills kind of college, but it knows one thing—it shouldn't cost you an arm and a leg to get a quality education. Instead, the college offers a multitude of career-oriented graduate and undergraduate programs in the business and science fields. As far as the application process, Baker College boasts a "right-to-try" procedure: no one is turned away for an errant test score or mistakes or gaps in or after high school. If you are ready to make a commitment to education, then Baker is ready to make a commitment to you.

Source: <http://www.online-degrees-today.com>

Lists top online institutions as well as other accredited programs.

The spring issue of *The Forum* will be available at:

www.VirginiaLMI.com

on Friday, April 9, 2010

For notifications on *The Forum* newsletter and other labor market publications, please follow us on Twitter:

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Product Order Form

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Virginia Job Outlook	Brochure with top occupations, growth rate, and annual average salaries by educational attainment—also available on the VEC website*	
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Occupational Wage Data Report: 2007	Reference material only for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United States • Statewide, Virginia • Workforce Investment Areas (WIAs) • Virginia Metropolitan Wage Data (MSAs) • Occupational Employment Statistical Regions Planning Districts • Planning District Commissions (PDCs) 	

*www.VirginiaLMI.com

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